JOSEPH ROYAL

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL
AFFAIRS AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

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Honourable Eugene Kostyra
Minister

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JOSEPH ROYAL

When Manitoba entered Confederation in 1870, almost one half of the province's inhabitants were French-speaking Métis. Although there were many capable leaders within the French-speaking community, most were inexperienced in the ways of the Canadian parliamentary system of government. To ensure that the newly-won rights of their parishioners would be protected, Manitoba's French-Catholic clergy attempted to recruit experienced men from Quebec. The clergy were assisted in their task by George-Etienne Cartier and other Ottawa politicians who were also anxious to have their own men present in the new province. Through their joint efforts, talented and ambitious French Canadians like Joseph Royal were persuaded to take advantage of the opportunities awaiting them in Manitoba.

Born in the parish of Repentigny, Lower Canada on 7 May 1837, Joseph Royal was the son of Edouard Royal and Marceline Therrien. Although Joseph showed remarkable talent as a child, his father could not afford to give him the classical education he deserved. Good fortune intervened and a generous benefactor agreed to cover the cost of the child's education. With this support, Royal began his studies with the Sulpicians in Montreal and completed them under the direction of the Jesuits. He went on to study law, articled under Sir George-Etienne Cartier and was called to the Lower Canada Bar in 1864.

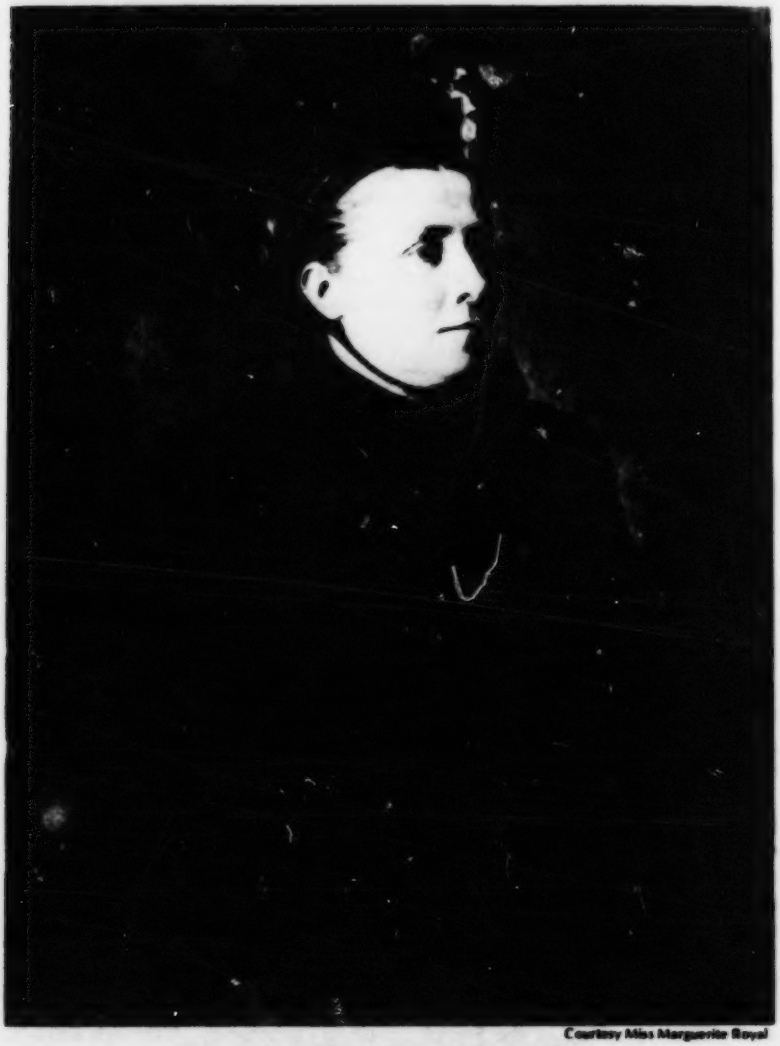
Although trained as a lawyer, Royal's first love was journalism. While a student he went to work for *La Minerve*, principal voice for the Conservative party in Lower Canada, and served as its editor from 1857 to 1859. Royal and several other young writers also established an avant-garde newspaper called *L'Ordre* and, in 1864, he helped to found a literary journal, *La Revue Canadienne*.

Le Nouveau-Monde, a newspaper established by Royal in 1867, helped to secure his reputation as a man with decided views on the religious and political issues that affected his French Canadian compatriots. A Roman Catholic and a Conservative, Royal was an ardent defender of Church-State relations. He was also committed to the principle of Canadian cultural duality, a theme he later examined in "La vie politique de Sir Louis-H. Lafontaine" and in *Histoire du Canada, 1841 à 1867*.

In 1856, Royal married Agnès Bruyère and began to raise a large family. Given that he had an established career and family life in Quebec, the decision to move to Manitoba was probably not an easy one to make. Spurred on by the reassurances of St. Boniface Bishop Taché and by the opportunities which a new province could offer a man of many talents, Royal uprooted his family and moved to Manitoba in late August 1870. Shortly after his arrival, he was nominated to represent St. François-Xavier West in the new provincial legislature.

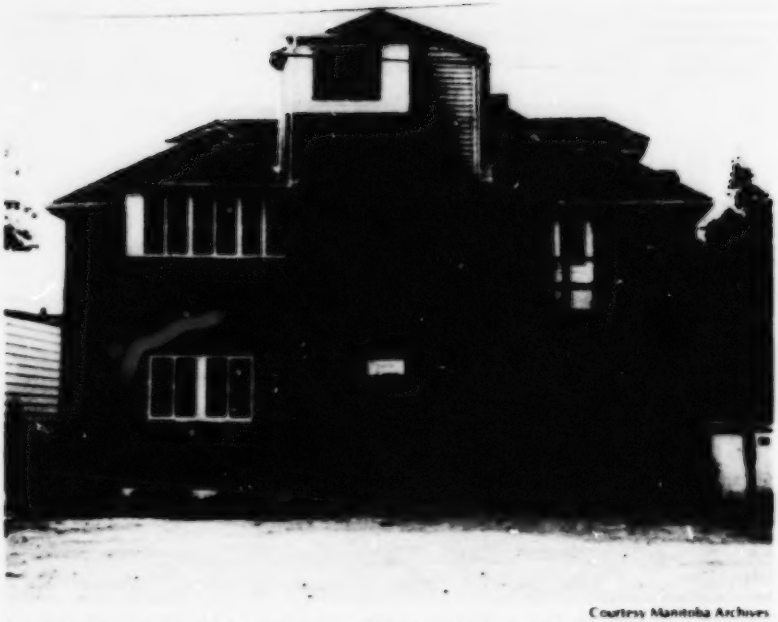
For eighteen years, the Royal family lived in St. Boniface and held a prominent position in the French-speaking community. Although Royal's daughters completed their studies and married in Quebec, two sons, one a physician and one a lawyer, settled permanently in Manitoba. In

the early 1870s Royal had an imposing residence constructed on Provencher Boulevard. Built of oak pieces covered with planks, it was divided into two dwellings and finished in brick after 1900. The building, somewhat disguised by its stucco facade, still stands at 147 Provencher Boulevard.



Courtesy Miss Marguerite Royal

Mrs. Joseph Royal, nee Agnès Bruyère



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

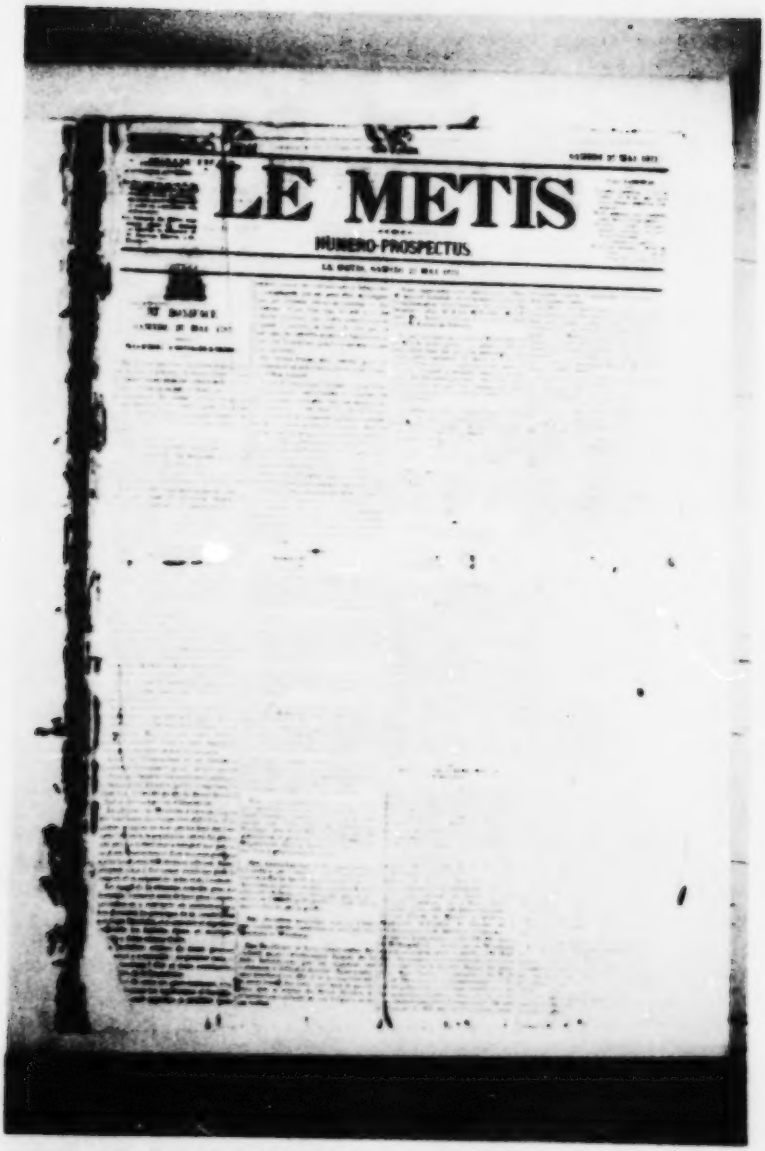
A rear view of Royal's residence, still standing at 147 Provencher Boulevard.

A Political Career

Royal and the other first members of the legislature were given the difficult task of assisting Lieutenant-Governor Adams G. Archibald in the organization of the province. Great tact and tolerance were required to manage the affairs of a community where the population was evenly divided between French and English-speaking people. Because of his experience and knowledge of parliamentary procedure, Royal was appointed Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. At the close of the first session all members extended him a vote of thanks for the skill and impartiality he displayed in this position.

Royal did not abandon his journalistic career once he came to Manitoba. Shortly after he arrived he began to publish *Le Métis*, a newspaper with printing offices in St. Boniface. Once again, Royal established a reputation as a forceful critic. As both a journalist and politician, he began with the assumption that French-speaking Manitobans merely wanted "les mêmes droits and la même justice pour toutes les classes de citoyens." When those rights were abused or justice was not forthcoming, Royal spoke out clearly in anger and indignation.

The rights of Manitoba's Métis population were one of Royal's main



First page, first issue of Le Metis founded by Joseph Dubuc and Joseph Royal, May 1871

concerns. In his newspaper and in the legislature he discussed the rights of the approximately 10,000 people of mixed blood who formed the majority of Manitoba's population. Time and again in editorials he criticized both the federal and provincial governments for being too slow to promote and protect those rights. He repeatedly attacked the actions of speculators who persisted in cutting wood on land which the Métis had traditionally held in common and from which they gathered fuel and building materials. His newspaper also served as a platform for the debate on land titles and the amnesty question and promoted the immigration of French-speaking people to Manitoba. *Le Métis* also kept its readers up-to-date on news of the legislature, on the activities of the members and on other issues of common interest and concern.

Royal found himself defending the rights of the Métis, not only in the legislature and his newspaper, but also in the courts. He and his associate, Joseph Dubuc, often represented these clients without receiving any fees. As Dubuc later noted, the Métis were unaccustomed to dealing with lawyers. Apparently, they believed that their political support was sufficient payment for services rendered by the two lawyer-politicians.

It was perhaps clear from the outset that the French-speaking community in Manitoba had a talented and powerful friend in Joseph Royal. An able story-teller with a penchant for sarcasm and humour, he was not a critic who could be easily ignored. Quick on the attack in print, Royal's prose was described as "elegant," "pure," and "well-thought out." L.A. Prud'homme, a friend and business associate, claimed that in both appearance and conversation, Royal's style "was beyond reproach." Described as "ambitious," "aggressive" and intent upon "self-aggrandizement" by his critics and as "impartial," "distinguished" and the very epitome of a French Canadian gentleman by his admirers and supporters, Royal was not the type of man who solicited an indifferent response from most people.

As Speaker of the House, Royal did not take part in much debate. Once he was relieved of these duties in 1872, his participation increased markedly. Generally moderate in his style and presentation, Royal continued to play a facilitating role in the legislature in the early years. In addition to advising on parliamentary procedure, he frequently clarified and explained French-language bills for English-speaking members. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to speak out on issues of importance, nor did he refrain from criticizing government officials.

On one occasion in the first session of the legislature, March 1871, Royal complained about the misconduct of troops that had been stationed at Red River to maintain peace and order. In comments directed to Adams G. Archibald, the lieutenant-governor, Royal warned that the troops' actions were eroding the confidence of the people whose trust Archibald had only just "succeeded in inspiring." Royal believed that the lieutenant-governor's leadership was essential to the "French cause" in Manitoba, and he strove to maintain a good working relationship with the Queen's representative. He respected and supported Archibald, whom he later defended when a committee of representatives accused him of partiality.

As an aspiring and ambitious young leader, Royal inevitably came into conflict with some of his colleagues. One of these was another lawyer, Marc-Amable Girard. In 1871, Girard was appointed to the Senate but did not step down from his position in the provincial executive council. Royal was incensed and complained that Girard should not have retained both posts. After discussing the matter with his colleagues and upon the advice of Sir John A. Macdonald and Archbishop Taché, Girard resigned as provincial treasurer in February 1872. Shortly thereafter, Royal joined the cabinet as provincial secretary and minister of public works.

Royal also took an active interest in the organization of Manitoba's system of education. On 3 May 1871, the Schools Act established a provincial educational system divided into two sections, one Catholic and one Protestant. Each section was to receive public funding in proportion to the number of students enrolled in their respective schools. Royal became the first superintendent of the Catholic section, succeeded in turn by Joseph Dubuc and A.A.C. LaRivière.

Through editorials in *Le Métis*, Royal outlined his views on the importance of education. He maintained that if Manitoba's French-speaking community expected to help direct the affairs of the province, their members would have to be properly educated. Nevertheless, he emphasized that the proper forms of education for men and women were different. Women had to be prepared to fulfill their roles as Christian mothers, whereas young men required more rigorous academic training at a higher level to fulfill their obligations as providers and social leaders. Although traditional and conservative, such views were not uncommon for the time.

Royal did not shy away from taking a stand on the more contentious issues affecting Manitoba politics. Before coming to the province, he had met with Sir George-Etienne Cartier who assured him that a general amnesty would be granted to all those who had participated in the Red River Resistance of 1869-70. When Cartier was defeated in his home riding of Montreal East in the federal election of 1872, Royal and other French-speaking Manitobans knew that they had lost a potential ally on the amnesty issue. On the advice of Lieutenant-Governor Archibald and other politicians, Louis Riel was persuaded to withdraw his candidacy from the Provencher riding, leaving it open for Cartier.

Royal was amongst those who supported Cartier. In an editorial in *Le Métis* on 18 September 1872, he rejoiced that a leading Quebec politician was to represent the interests of a substantial portion of Manitoba's French community. After Cartier's death in 1873, however, the question of amnesty dragged on. In a deposition made to a Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1874, Royal urged that amnesty be granted and reiterated Cartier's earlier promise.

During the election of 1872, Royal and his colleagues paid heavily for their support of a Government candidate in the Selkirk riding. The offices of *Le Métis* were ransacked, the presses broken and the type scattered on the street. The damage, believed to be the work of "Orangistes" or the Ontario-Protestant element, was estimated at $7,000 to $8,000.

A Fight for Leadership

As early as 1872, the French-speaking members of the Legislature began to recognize that they were losing ground to an increasing English and Protestant majority. Their position did not improve in December 1872, when Alexander Morris replaced Archibald as lieutenant-governor. Although a tactful man, Morris never established the same rapport with Royal and the other French-speaking members that Archibald had enjoyed.

The dissatisfaction of Manitoba's French community and its political representatives gradually intensified. A major cause of discontent was the loss of equal representation for each of the province's two linguistic groups. Because of the change in population, five fewer representatives of the French element sat in the legislature in 1874. Their position in the legislature became even less secure when the allegiance of Attorney-General H.J. Clarke began to waver. The animosity between Clarke, the representative for the French-Catholic riding of St. Charles, and Joseph Royal grew, as both vied for recognition as the political leader of Manitoba's French-speaking community.

Another and more important source of dissatisfaction was the arrest of Ambroise-Didyme Lepine, Riel's Adjutant-General during 1869-70. At a preliminary hearing in 1874, Lepine was charged with the murder of Thomas Scott. The accused was defended by Dubuc and Royal. The latter called upon J.A. Chapleau, Q.C., a celebrated Quebecois criminal lawyer, to conduct the defence in French, while he examined some of the witnesses and addressed the jury in English. According to Dubuc, Royal lacked both courtroom experience and eloquence, and accepted his secondary role with good grace claiming that it didn't much matter what was said to English juries.

In 1874 Royal and two other members of the executive council were sent to Ottawa to request the extension of Manitoba's boundaries and an increase in the federal government subsidy to the province for operational expenses. The federal government refused to increase the subsidy, claiming that the Manitoba government should reduce its expenditure to "a sum proportionate to the circumstances and income of that Province." That same year saw the fall of the H.J. Clarke administration, followed by a five-month ministry led by Marc-Amable Girard in which Royal did not sit on the executive council.

Royal came to the forefront again in 1875 as attorney-general and provincial secretary in the Davis government. Between 1875 and 1879 he was the most important French Canadian politician in the province, and the second most important figure in the provincial government. Although Davis was referred to as Premier, his government was known as the Davis-Royal administration.

The role played by Royal in the establishment of the University of Manitoba demonstrated both his continued commitment to the development of education and his important position within the government. By 1877, St. Boniface College, St. John's College and Manitoba College were already in existence, but the prelates and prominent citizens of the province were anxious to have a university established. The Davis-

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Members of the Provincial Cabinet, 1874

Royal government and Lieutenant-Governor Morris were approached on the subject. Royal drafted the *University Bill,* presented it to the legislature and the University of Manitoba became a degree-granting institution only. Royal became the first Vice-Chancellor of the University and held that office until 1888.

In 1879, however, while serving under the Norquay administration Royal took actions which brought his career in Manitoba's provincial politics to an end. Through a coalition, he attempted to oust the Norquay government with a view to installing himself as Premier and securing the French Canadian position more firmly in Manitoba politics. The manoeuvre failed. Norquay won the support of all the English-speaking members of the Assembly and demanded Royal's resignation. Although the rift created between the French and English-speaking members of the legislature was profound, the open animosity gradually subsided. The French-speaking members were left in a somewhat less secure position within the province's political order, and Royal was left without public office.

When Joseph Dubuc gave up his seat in the Canadian parliament to become a judge in 1879, Royal served as his replacement. In the federal election of 1880, he won in the Provencher riding, and his work in the House of Commons continued to reflect his commitments to Manitoba. Royal fought to reduce the high freight rates between Winnipeg and St. Paul and to guarantee land titles to the "old settlers" of the province. He also promoted the establishment of industrial schools for the native population.

Throughout his career, and in his many activities, Royal remained committed to the interests of the French-speaking population which had taken him to Manitoba. In 1871 he had returned to Montreal to accompany a group of teachers, labourers and farmers coming to make a fresh start in Manitoba. Royal was active in the Manitoba-based Société de Colonisation and became its director in 1882. A man of many talents and interests he became the first President of the Law Society of Manitoba in March 1877, and in 1881 became President of La Société St. Jean Baptiste. He also continued to pursue his interests in the history and literature of his people and country. Apparently, Royal was a well-known writer in Quebec and was rated highly amongst late nineteenth century French Canadian writers.

Since 1873, Royal had also served on the North-West Council, the advisory body set up to govern the affairs of the North-West Territories. In 1888 he resigned his seat in Parliament to accept an appointment in Regina as Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories. After his five year term of office, he returned to Montreal where he became editor-in-chief of *La Minerve*. After the demise of that newspaper in 1899, Royal became editor-in-chief of *Le Journal*. He died in Montreal on 23 August 1902.

Joseph Royal was a versatile, talented and ambitious personality who made a substantial contribution to the political life of Manitoba in its first decade of existence. As a journalist, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba from 1871 to 1879 and as a Member of the Canadian Parliament from 1879 to 1888, he promoted the interests of his compatriots in the West. During his early years in Manitoba, he showed great concern for the Métis population, and he never lost his belief in the principle of Canadian cultural duality. It was this principle upon which Manitoba had been founded and which Royal sought to preserve.

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Members of the North West Council; Royal is probably the individual seated third from the left.

Suggestions for Further Reading

One major source of information on Joseph Royal is a paper presented by one of his contemporaries, L.-A. Prud'homme to the Royal Society of Canada, entitled "Joseph Royal, sa vie, ses oeuvres," (Mémoires de la Société royale du Canada, 2e série, 1904-5). Other sources include Marie-Anna Roy, *Les visages du vieux Saint-Boniface* (St-Boniface, l'auteur, 1971); the Alexander Morris Collection and the Joseph Dubuc Memoirs, Autobiography and Correspondence in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

Most of Royal's political and legal career can be followed in *Le Métis,* 1871 to 1881, and in the *Debates of the House of Commons,* 1879 to 1888. The political manoeuvre of 1879 is well documented in Gerald Friesen's article, "Homeland to Hinterland: Political Transition in Manitoba, 1870-1879" (Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers,* Saskatoon, 1979).

For an account of Royal's activities as Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Territories from 1888 to 1893, see L.H. Thomas, *The Struggle for Responsible Government in the North-West Territories 1870-97* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1956, reprinted 1978).

Credits

The cover photograph of Joseph Royal is printed courtesy of Miss Marguerite Royal.

Special thanks to Monsieur Lionel Dorge, Director of La Société historique de Saint-Boniface and Diane Payment, an historian with the Prairie Regional Offices of Parks Canada for their assistance in the preparation of this pamphlet.

JOSEPH ROYAL
(1837-1902)
A lawyer and journalist, Royal came to Manitoba in 1870. The following year he founded *Le Métis*, a newspaper which spoke eloquently for the French Canadians and Métis of Manitoba and the Northwest until 1881.
Royal as member for St. Francois-Xavier, served successively as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly 1871-72, Provincial Secretary 1872-74, Minister of Public Works 1874-76, and Attorney General 1876-78.
From 1879-1888 he represented Provencher in the House of Commons; in the latter year he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the Northwest Territory. In 1893, Royal returned to Montreal to resume his career in Journalism.
THE HISTORIC SITES ADVISORY BOARD
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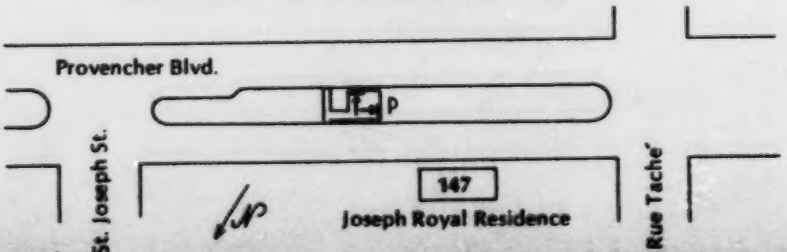
Two plaques, one in French and one in English, are located on Provencher Boulevard, between Taché Avenue and St. Joseph Street in St. Boniface.



OUR HERITAGE

We have received great gifts as our heritage in Canada — beautiful rivers and parks, rolling hills, trees and grassland; the rich resources of nature are ours to protect, cherish and enjoy.

Wherever man has been, there are marks of defilement and destruction — let us resolve that this shall not be our legacy to the twenty-first century. Let us rather honour and emulate those who went before us as pioneers, who gave of themselves, building and creating, enriching the land. They have earned our thanks, and while we cannot repay them, we can respect their achievements and resolve that we will try to follow them in action and in attitude.

For this we set aside this special place in our Province, a site that is part of history.

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POOR

QUALITY

ORIGINAL